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THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL OF PAINTERS

THE group of artists, called after the place of their favorite subjects the Hudson River Painters, presents the nearest approach to a native school of art which America has yet produced. Before the

visited Europe, it was not as students who went there to learn their craft but as already practising artists. In general they had a strong belief in the superior beauty of the American landscape and this belief



SUMMER AFTERNOON BY ASHER B. DURAND

time of their appearance our art was practically an offshoot from the contemporary English school and after them, with a few prominent exceptions, our artists have been cosmopolitans, with aims that could not be called peculiar to America. It is the national flavor in the Hudson River Painters that gives them their particular interest.

After the ties which connected us with the mother-country had been weakened and a new self-consciousness had come over the young nation, these painters had their rise. They were mostly trained in America, that is, what training they had, and when they

was shared by the patrons who gave them generous encouragement.

The vitality of the group was short-lived. Founded as it was on the comparative isolation of America, it could not withstand the increasing contact with European ideas and standards, and from the last quarter of the century the Hudson River pictures were no longer sought for and rapidly fell into an undeserved disrepute, from which only in our own time are they beginning to emerge.

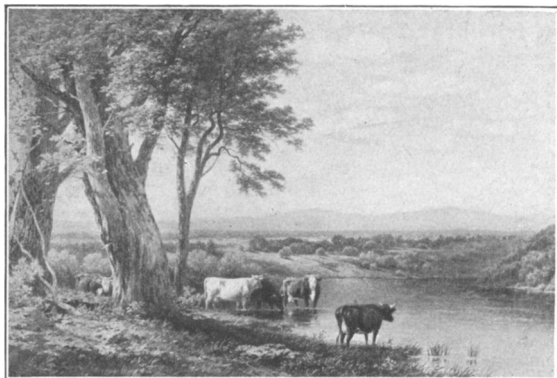
The present exhibition is made up from the number of excellent and important examples of these paintings which belong to

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

PAINTINGS OF THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL

BROUGHT TOGETHER IN COMMEMORA-
TION OF THE COMPLETION
OF

THE CATSKILL AQUEDUCT



SUPPLEMENT TO THE BULLETIN OF
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
OCTOBER, MCMXVII

the Museum. The following comments on the artists and their pictures are intended to serve as a guide for the visitors to the exhibition.

THOMAS DOUGHTY was the earliest who painted American landscape in a characteristic fashion. He did not adopt art as a profession until rather late in life, giving up for it the business of a leather manufacturer. A gentle and sincere love for country places is the ever-present quality of

founder of the realistic tendencies of the school in distinction to Cole, an artist of an allegorical and poetic intention, who furnished its first romantic element. Four works by Durand are in this exhibition: *The Beeches* (D 93-6), dated 1845, is the earliest; *In the Woods* (D 93-3), 1855, is of the same general type, and both manifest his extreme care in the delineation of each detail of tree trunk, shrubbery, or rock. *The Landscape* (D 93-1), 1853, comes between



THE MOUNTAIN FORD BY THOMAS COLE

his pictures. The example of his work here shown, the *Landscape* (D 743-3) is one of the most ambitious of his efforts. Two other works by him may be found in Gallery 12 (D 743-1, D 743-2).

ASHER B. DURAND was a more important artist. He was a few years younger than Doughty. Like him he became a painter at middle age. He had been an engraver in his youth and the hard and dry engraver's method influenced his manner of painting. One of his studies for engraving, the copy of *Ariadne*, by Vanderlyn, hangs in Gallery 12 (D 93-4). He was interested particularly in the facts of landscape and, broadly speaking, may be termed the

these in time. His most attractive picture here is the *Summer Afternoon* (D 93-7), 1865. It was bought directly from the artist by Morris K. Jesup. In the Jesup house, the picture was placed in a panel constructed for it over a mantel, and its frame of dark wood enhanced the delicacy of its coloring. It does not show to equal advantage in our surroundings. "The sky, the atmosphere, the vegetation and especially the noble group of trees, all breathe an air of quiet brooding, warmth and repose," says Tuckerman, the enthusiastic chronicler of these painters, writing in his *Book of the Artists*.

THOMAS COLE, who with Durand



THE BEECHES BY ASHER B. DURAND

shares the leadership of the Hudson River Painters, was born in England but came to America as a youth and lived in various places before he came to New York, where Durand was the first to recognize his ability. In his time his allegorical landscapes with figures, were his most famous works. Of these, the series called the Course of Empire, in the New York Historical Society, comprises the most easily seen examples. He traveled in England, France, and Italy, and painted

1846, is purely imaginary and might have been inspired by Walter Scott. Oxbow (C 671-5) is a view on the Connecticut River near Northampton. It is nearer to the style of Durand, in certain qualities, than any other of these pictures, and in some directions, the foreground particularly, it approaches the work of Frederic E. Church, the pupil of its author.

FREDERIC E. CHURCH was the most skilful of all these painters. From Cole he



THE PARTHENON BY FREDERIC E. CHURCH

some of his pictures abroad. Local facts meant less to one of his temperament than to men of the type of Durand and his followers. The Roman Aqueduct (C 671-3) was painted in Florence in 1832, and The Titan's Goblet (C 671-4), 1833, was also painted abroad. This last is a fantastic picture, in which an enormous goblet, the stem of which is a great tree trunk, is placed in a landscape. The goblet contains an ocean with ships sailing on it and at its rim are forests and plains in which appear buildings and ruins. It is an illustration, it is said, of the Norse legend of the Tree of Life. The Valley of the Vaucluse (C 671-2) was painted in Rome in 1841. The scene is near Avignon—at a place made famous by Petrarch. The Mountain Ford (C 671-6),

inherited the love of the "noble subject," immense views, such as the Heart of the Andes (C 47-2), or the Aegean Sea (C 47-1), both in Gallery 12. "He arranged all . . . in a sort of panoramic combination and added every conceivable adjunct of light and atmosphere, rainbows, mists, sunsets, eruptions, and the result is not absurd, but, on the contrary, always interesting, and, in some of the later work, like the Parthenon, noble and beautiful." Thus writes Samuel Isham, in his History of American Painting, and he adds: "There is probably no man today who could do the same thing." An examination of the Aegean Sea, for instance, will prove this latter assertion beyond a doubt. The Parthenon (C 47-3) that Mr. Isham speaks

of, once a part of the excellent Jesup Collection, is the only example of Church in this exhibition, as the size of the gallery does not permit the showing of the larger canvases. The Parthenon was painted in 1871. Compared with the works of an earlier time it is a simple picture. The effect is that of the golden light from the afternoon sun and there is no departure from plausible fact in its arrangement. "Noble and beautiful" are fitting adjectives to apply to it.

exhibited, "the truth to locality and geographical or botanical fact" for which he was praised is joined to a sense of the impressiveness of the views he was portraying. The Landscape (K 41-39) is a scene on the Hudson River, north of West Point, looking toward Storm King. Lake George (K 41-40) was painted in 1869; the nobility of its conception is only marred by the inadequate and fussy foreground. A peculiarity of many of these pictures is that,



LAKE GEORGE BY JOHN F. KENSETT

The influence of Durand was more extended than that of Cole. The most prominent of Durand's followers in his own time was JOHN F. KENSETT. His vogue was enormous and as late as 1873, the year of his death, the pictures and studies left in his studio sold for the great sum of \$150,000. Thirty-eight of these, some unfinished, the work of the artist's last summer, belong to the Museum but are not at present on view. His pictures in this exhibition show the artist in a juster light than do the thirty-eight sketches, and explain better the high appreciation in which he was held by his contemporaries. He also had been an engraver and shows it in his painting. But in the two examples here

though the skies and distances are often skilfully painted, the artists found difficulty in arranging the nearer parts of the landscape and imparting solidity to them.

This criticism applies with greater force to the work of JOHN W. CASILAER, who in all ways resembles Kensett. In his view of Lake George (C 26-2), painted in 1857, the sky is tender and luminous, the distant mountains are truthfully and sympathetically rendered, but the shore and trees in the foreground one would say to be the work of another and less skilful painter. These incongruities are to be expected, however, in the work of artists whose training has been more or less haphazard, and Casilaer, too, had been an engraver and

applied its method to painting. The Distant View of the Catskills (C 26-1; shown on the cover of this pamphlet), rather a conventional work, dates from the artist's late years, having been executed in 1891.

With the others in the following of Durand can be grouped JASPER F. CROUSEY, WILLIAM HART, JAMES BRICHER, and the early work of DAVID JOHNSON. The Landscape by JASPER F. CROUSEY (C 881-1), 1853, displays no remarkable differences in excellencies or defects from the works of his fellow-painters. WILLIAM HART is at his best in the Seashore—Morning (H 251-2), a work of richness of color and skill in handling, particularly in the blended and fused tones of the sky and distance. His Scene at Napanoch (H 251-1) is hardly distinguishable from the works of the others. JAMES BRICHER'S contribution to the exhibition, Marine (B 76-1), is a pleasant souvenir of a tranquil summer afternoon on the seashore. DAVID JOHNSON, in some of his early work carried to a far degree the luminosity and delicacy in the imitation of hazy distances, which was the chief asset of these painters. Near Squam Lake, New Hampshire (J 63-3), painted in 1856, is an excellent example of this quality. Bayside, New Rochelle (J 63-2), is a later work and exemplifies in itself the effect of the ill-digested foreign ideals on the American school. It is little more than an imitation of Rousseau, clever enough as such, but the quality which made his early pictures worth while has quite disappeared.

ALBERT BIERSTADT, born in Germany and trained for several years in Düsseldorf, was an imitator of Frederic Church, but was far from attaining the skill of that painter, though he was equally famous for a time. His Rocky Mountains (B 473-1), 1863, shown in the northeast stairway, was one of the sensations of its epoch and was sold for \$25,000. His example in this exhibition, The Merced River, Yosemite Valley (B 473-2), has precisely the same qualities, but, owing to its more reasonable size and less stupendous subject, appears to far better effect than the other.

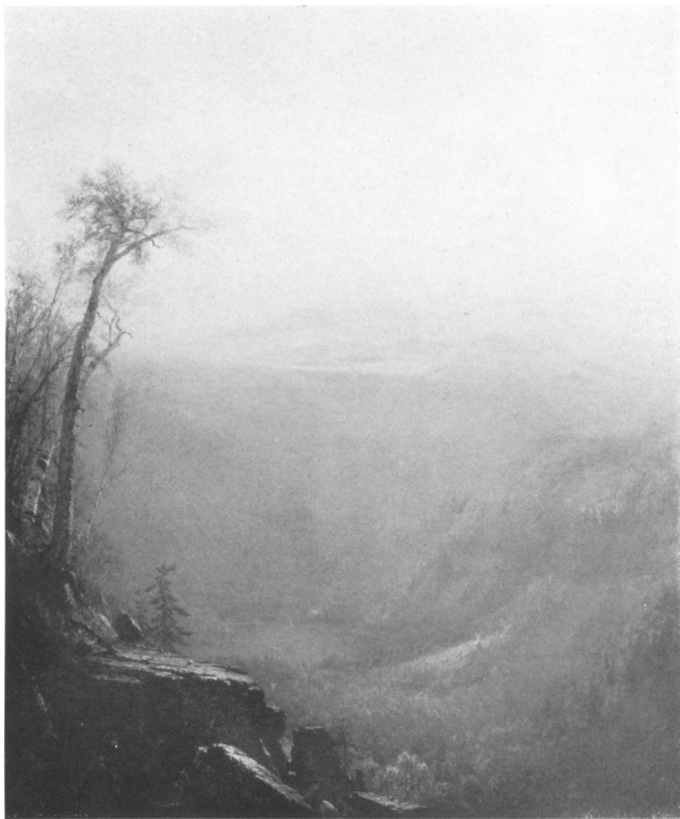
SANDFORD R. GIFFORD appears somewhat apart from his fellow-painters, his

most lively influence being apparently received from the type of Turner's pictures, where the effect of looking toward the early morning or late afternoon sun is the motive. Certainly the two works by him here shown, Kaaterskill Clove (G 361-3), 1862, a view in the Catskill Mountains, and Tivoli (G 361-2), 1879, display this influence.

WORTHINGTON WHITTREDGE was trained at Düsseldorf, in his time the chief goal of American students, but the style of that school was thrown off after some years' practice at home. Evening in the Woods (W 61-1) was influenced by Durand's wood interiors and shows the same quiet love of nature that belonged to the Durand group as a whole. But this manner was changed again later and the Camp Meeting (W 61-2), 1874, is more rounded out and less expected. There is a noble grove of trees by a lake or quiet river and a distant crowd of tiny figures gathered in front of a stand where the preacher is seen, and nearer to the spectator some children have strayed to the water's edge where they watch an improvised toy boat.

JERVIS MCENTEE was of a somewhat similar temperament. He received some instruction from Church but did not attempt his master's sensational compositions. The Autumn Landscape with Figures (M 15-1) gives a favorable idea of his attainments.

In addition to the pictures already mentioned, this exhibition contains canvases by two painters who should be classed as products of the Hudson River School, though not grouped with it, their later work being the result of other influences. They are Alexander H. Wyant and George Inness. Their earlier pictures show no general dissimilarities from those of the older painters. ALEXANDER WYANT'S history is like the histories of the others. After youthful difficulties and discouragements he managed to travel in Europe, got some training in Düsseldorf, and returned home to try his fortune, with aims and ideals analogous to theirs. The Mohawk Valley (W 97-7) is an example of this time, and falls indubitably under the classification of a "Hudson River picture." Afterwards his interest in facts and details passed into an effort toward the expression of a



KAATERSKILL CLOVE BY SANDFORD R. GIFFORD

more unified mood of landscape. His development may be traced in the Old Clearing (W 97-6) and View in County Kerry, Ireland (W 97-1), in Gallery 12, and in the various pictures of the Hearn Collection in Gallery 13.

GEORGE INNESS also shifted for himself as far as his art education was concerned. The work of Church, Kensett, and the others was the inspiration of his youth, though soon he seemed to feel the tenuousness of their aims. Voyages to Europe, first to Rome, then to Paris, widened his outlook. The Delaware Valley (In 6-5) of this exhibition, dated 1865, shows plainly

the source of his first influence, though the possibilities of his later development are evidenced in it as well. Soon after the time of its painting, his very personal outlook, combined with his assimilation of broadening ideas from Europe, puts his work in another category. In his production of this period, about the middle of the 'sixties, Inness still followed the tenets of the Hudson River School, and it is he who reaches its highest achievement. The single picture which marks its culmination is the noble Peace and Plenty (In 6-3) of the Hearn Collection (shown in Gallery 13), finished in the same year as the Delaware Valley.

B. B.

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¹This Index refers only to the paintings of the Museum's collection which have been assembled in one room. Allusions to the other paintings of the Hudson River School will be found in the text.